



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

November 30, 2014 First Sunday of Advent

Gospel reading Matthew 13:33-37 *[To be read aloud]*

Jesus said to his disciples: “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

Brief commentary:

Following last Sunday's feast of Christ the King, the Church with her liturgy now turns her gaze toward the great mystery of Immanuel ("God with/among us"), the Incarnation and birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Advent is a season of joyful expectation, a call to readiness, a call to examination of our lives in the light of the coming reign of God, and therefore a season of watching and advancing with our lives the Light which dawns upon and within the whole of Creation. Each of the four Sundays of Advent – represented by the increasing glow of the Advent wreath – will call each of us to consider how we are living our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ and as apostles of his love in our world, how we battle the darkness in our lives and in our world by being agents of 'the light of the world' that shines within us, Jesus Christ. The vivid texts from Isaiah, a prophet so important to the earliest Christians and to the Advent season, expresses the deep introspection of a people who were open to admit and confess their sins before God and who confidently hoped in God's gracious love for them despite their shortcomings: "Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands." Likewise, the psalmist calls on God to remember "the vine that your right hand has planted...then we will no more withdraw from you." Paul's message within the first letter to the Corinthians is likewise ideal for us: "...Wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you firm to the end and irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this season it has become the norm in society to prepare for Christmas mostly on material terms: decorations, parties, and especially gift buying. The commercialization of Christmas is now well-entrenched and institutionalized within Western society, with little attention to its true meaning. Advent is not at all a part of the secular preparation, and even the Christmas season itself (Christmas eve to the feasts of the Epiphany and Baptism of the Lord) comes to an abrupt end on Christmas day, with simply a residue of after-Christmas sales and returns. By the end of it all, most people are psychologically, physically, and financially exhausted. Would Jesus of the Gospels even recognize our madness? Christians must resolutely make every effort at heeding today's scriptures, and 'live by the Word of God and not by gifts, decorations, and parties alone'. Instead of the commercial panic of the commercial Christmas season (now engulfing all of the Fall season), today's gospel calls on Jesus' disciples to soberly "Watch!" Indeed, for Christians the Advent season commemorates three 'watches', three periods of waiting, expectation, and preparation for God's saving revelation and redemption in the world: the long waiting of humanity for a savior, most particularly developed by the people of Israel until the birth of the messiah just over two thousand years ago; the yearly liturgical season of Advent in preparation for the liturgical celebration of the meaning and significance of the coming of the Son of God into the world every feast of the Nativity; and the waiting for the ultimate encounter with the Lord at the end of our lives and at the eschatological end of history. The message is clear: do not be distracted by the craziness of life, the gimmicks and tricks and toys that replete our lives; instead, focus on the Lord, be awake, firm, watchful, for the coming of Christ into our world every day, in our neighbor in need, in the everyday of daily life, in the people and experiences of our lives, in the graced moments and even in those where God seems distant. The message of Advent: awake with joyful anticipation, God is near, God is among us – yet coming to us – open your heart with hopeful expectation and be ready...Immanuel is coming!

Today's reading offers significant messages:

- The season of Advent is the yearly invitation to seriously consider our lives – as individual Christians and as a Church – in the light of the coming reign of God. It calls us to battle the many darknesses in our world and in our lives with the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- The materialistic commercialization of Christmas skips Advent all-together and distracts us from its true meaning. With our Advent observances, Christians must unveil for themselves and for the world the true transforming, liberating, and life-giving good news at the heart of this season.
- Advent is a season of hopeful and joyful expectation, remembering the birth of the Lord Jesus, his daily approach in our lives, and his ultimate revelation at the universal goal of history. For Christians, knowing that life on earth is a penultimate reality should spur us to engage life and this world more seriously and lovingly.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- What darknesses do I need to overcome in my life and in the world with the light of Jesus and his Gospel?
- What can I, my family and parish, do to prepare as Christians for the feast of the Nativity of the Lord so that its true celebration will help transform us and our world?
- Do I live my life in joyful and hopeful expectation of the coming reign of God? Do I advance with my actions, with active faith, hope, charity, compassion, justice and mercy, the coming of the Lord in glory?